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# SOCIAL DUTIES

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## CHAPTER VI. SOCIAL DUTIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

### I. CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL PROBLEMS

Most of the discussions familiar to readers of literature of social problems relate chiefly to the conditions of city life. The reasons for this fact are obvious. Authors and journalists generally reside in cities or large towns and they write about the experiences which immediately affect them. The more startling and sensational evils are revealed in cities; there poverty is most distressing, vice most hideous, crime most terrible, class struggles most fierce, the contrast of luxury and want most alarming and exasperating; there colossal fortunes tower above mean beggary, and monumental office buildings look down on crowded warrens of toilers and immigrants. The rapid growth of cities in recent times has thrust innumerable and vexatious problems of government and industry into our faces and brought men to a crisis where questions cannot be adjourned, where issues of life and death must be met by instant action. Therefore social problems are generally supposed to be only those of huge aggregations of population.

And even of late, since the improvement of conditions in the country has become the object of more general interest, the problems of rural society are not always worthily stated for consideration. This judgment is the result of an impression made by the reading of a very large number of volumes and documents issued by the great government departments of agriculture, by institutions of education, and by writers of high authority on rural subjects. We need, in further discussion of social duties under rural conditions, to give a larger and worthier place to the ultimate values of life in relation to agriculture.[1] The defect in much that has been written about social

[1] Here again, to avoid repetition, the reader is requested to keep in mind the analysis of social ends in the first chapter of this series.

life in the country is the relatively too great emphasis placed upon the wealth interest, on the industry of the farmer; he is treated too much as if he were merely a producer of certain commodities, merely a beast of burden like his patient oxen. It is too often assumed that the only scientific interest is in the larger production of corn, of milk and meat, of wool and cotton.

Therefore in studying the moral obligations of a rural neighborhood we must begin with the conception that the chief task of the farmer lies in the development of human personalities, in the cultivation of spiritual powers, in enriching the permanent self, and in sharing the highest goods of civilization on the widest possible scale. It is here assumed that the student has gained and holds this point of view, has already come to believe that a farmer has right to a full human life, to all that is essentially good, and that it is his duty to further this kind of life in the community. The worth and value of these ends being assumed for our purpose, we have here to consider some of those modes of conduct and those forms of institutional activity which are adapted to promote the accepted ends. This is the kind of conduct which alone can deserve the name of social morality. Exhaustive treatment is not here possible; the aim is limited to provoking investigation and indicating the way in which sound moral judgments can best be formed.

## II. SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF RURAL WELFARE—ORDER, LIBERTY, AND OPPORTUNITY

1. ORDER.—It is too generally admitted to require proof, that civilization cannot move forward where life and property are insecure, where the strong-armed robber snatches away from the toiler the products of peaceful toil, where selfish and sensual men can gratify base appetites without restraint, where each man must go armed to his work and fortify his home. Obviously the first duty of a community is to establish and maintain order. And since the local hamlet or township or isolated neighborhood is often unable to guard its fields, houses, treasures, and merchandise, the commonwealth must come to its aid with superior force. In some civilized countries a body of mounted police, under the direction of the chief officers of the state, patrol roads and lanes, while detectives follow thieves and

other suspected persons and bring them to justice. Here let the student consider whether a rural police patrol would not make the life of farmers, especially of the women, more secure. What is the duty of the people of a state to the scattered persons who are kept in constant dread of vicious tramps and vagabonds, both white and black, who fill many rural homes with terror? When the police and courts fail to protect life and property, men are driven to resort to some form of lynch law, and this is wasteful and demoralizing. The class might well discuss this word of Professor Fairlie and test it by further inquiry into the facts:

A long line of judicial decisions has clearly established the rule of law in this country, that locally appointed police officers are not, strictly speaking, local officers, but are agents of the state governments for the maintenance of the public peace and order. In spite of this legal theory, there has been developed no effective state administrative control in this important branch of local government. Some occasional and haphazard steps have been taken in many states but no systematic and permanent machinery has been established. . . . . Some supervision could be easily established by making the sheriffs more clearly responsible for police conditions in the local districts within their counties and requiring them to make regular reports to the governor or to some other state officer. To this might be added a regular inspection of the sheriffs in each state. . . . . Like the state supervision established in other lines, they would improve the work of local authorities. In a few states there have been established small bodies of state police for service throughout the state.

2. LIBERTY.—The maintenance of order should be discriminating or it will repress freedom. The soul of man must have room to think and his body room to act. An entire community sometimes becomes narrow, bigoted, selfish, blind, and in the name of order turns tyrant and puts out the light of science, chokes its best prophets. Only immoral and injurious citizens should walk in chains, and even they should be taught to use liberty wisely. We boast of being "the land of the free" because our fathers have fought the battle of religious, civil, and social freedom for us. No longer is a man imprisoned or burned for his opinions in politics or theology. Yet many are not aware that in this very home of liberty there are large districts where a young physician dare not speak or write what he has learned in schools of science without incurring a boycott of the church and consequent starvation, and where the teacher of biology in a high school is tempted to play the hypocrite to retain his chance to earn

his living. There are many ways by which pious men suffocate the life of the Holy Spirit in man, and think sincerely they are doing God service, and this condition is more frequently found in villages than in cities. An intellectually dead hamlet knows more ways of tormenting a man who is too big for it than the Inquisition of Spain ever devised. This does not stop discussion, but it forces young men and women of talent to fly from the country and take refuge in towns where they are free even if poor. Many of the most relentless persecutors in past ages have been conscientious and religious. Criminals disturb order, and saints sometimes are foes to liberty, and the majority of good folks seem to care more for quiet than for truth.

3. OPPORTUNITY.—It is the duty of a community not only to protect order and grant reasonable freedom but also to furnish opportunity for all citizens to enter into life. A boy may be free to go where he will, but if he is not educated he remains a dwarf and starveling. Let members of the class look about them and discover instances of children growing up mutilated in soul as they may be starved in body. There are entire townships where not one family has any incentive to do more than satisfy animal wants, although the soil is rich and the climate favorable. This is because they are cut off from centers of culture, as schools, churches, and means of information.

There must be equality of opportunity in respect to rights before the law, right to influence legislatures, to serve the public according to ability, to move about in public places, to enjoy sanitary conditions of living, to have means of recreation and culture, to send children to free schools, to be protected in relations of employer and employed, to be treated with courtesy, whether rich or poor, and to share in general good will.[2] In this connection may be studied the value of a state system of free public schools, under central direction and supervision; of federation and co-operation of churches in a state in order to prevent waste of means, and to provide educational facilities for all citizens; of the national postal system as a means of extension of means of knowledge; of means of transportation, electric lines and improved roads.[3]

[2] Giddings, *Elements of Sociology*, p. 328.

[3] Problems of government in rural townships are ably discussed by J. A. Fairlie, *Local Government in Counties, Towns and Villages.*

### III. CARE OF PUBLIC HEALTH IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

1. CONDITIONS OF HEALTH.—These are generally more favorable in the country than in the city: the light may fall into every room, and at work sunshine plays over the body. The air is purer and exercise outside walls is part of the daily order of work. There is freedom from unnatural and perpetual excitement, noise, strain, close and superheated theaters, enticements to low vice, open saloons, and gambling-places.

But even in rural neighborhoods there is much preventable disease due to removable causes: improper food, neglect of ventilation, exposure to contagious and infectious disease, pollution of water and milk, injection of fever germs by insects, drains from kitchen reeking with poison. And there are causes of sickness which are only in part under human control: the hardship of labor especially at certain seasons, exposure to severe weather and extremes of temperature, worry incident to uncertainty of crops, the destruction of growing crops and cattle by the enemies of the farmer. To this one must add distance from physicians in emergencies, the want of nursing, and occasionally the improper physical habits of ignorance and the vices of human nature.

2. AMELIORATING METHODS.—These may be found, and it is the duty of each community to discover and adopt such methods as experience approves. Illustrations may give hints to spur members of the class to further inquiry.

*a*) In the best schools instruction is given to children in relation to the structure and functions of the human body, anatomy, physiology, hygiene, house sanitation, cooking, foods, and first aid to the sick and injured.

*b*) But the instruction of childhood is not enough, and young people need to continue their studies by means of lectures, classes, and books carefully chosen by experts and not recommended by traveling peddlers. In several states the meetings of farmers' institutes, under the direction of experts in state agricultural colleges and with the aid of competent physicians, have done a valuable service. The talk and practice of the farm necessarily touch upon laws of health of animals, and occasionally greater care is given to domestic animals than to the family itself.

*c*) A significant movement is that to secure better hospital facilities and nursing in the country. In at least the chief county town there ought to be a public hospital for the treatment of medical and surgical cases which cannot so well be treated at home. These local hospitals also become training schools for nurses, the supply of whom is woefully scant in many parts of the land. It seems entirely possible to provide visiting nurses who may go from house to house showing mothers and daughters how to care for their sick, to make beds, prepare special diet, dress sores and wounds, feed infants, and a thousand things for which a physician has no time and which only a carefully trained nurse knows how to do. In cities such nurses are sent by benevolent societies among the poor with great advantage. The only difficulty is that too many people are so ignorant of modern nursing that they imagine there is nothing to learn, and in that state of mind nothing is learned. Telephones and trolley lines are gradually improving medical service outside the towns.

*d*) There is more and more need of extending the authority and activity of the state boards of health into every township of each state. There ought to be a systematic supervision of the conditions of health and the causes of disease by some central authority, so that not one district can be overlooked. Examples of what may be accomplished may be cited: the notification of contagious diseases, as scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, etc., by placarding and prohibition of sending to school without medical permission. The disinfection of houses and clothing ought to be insured by vigilant officials responsible to the state. The means of transportation, now becoming more public, should be brought under systematic control. Vaccination must be made certain and not left to the whims and superstitions of the ignorant. Careful supervision of persons afflicted with tuberculosis should be part of the duty of local officers responsible to the state. It is important that dairies should be inspected and made sanitary not only in the interest of town customers but even more in the interest of dairymen and farmers. The bacteria which kill customers are not apt to spare the owners of a filthy stable. If the water used to wash the milk vessels or to dilute the milk for weak city stomachs is from a foul source it may punish the culprit who carelessly and wickedly uses it to wrong another. In the inspection of

adulterated foods and medicines kept for sale to farmers it is not difficult to discover the advantage to the farmer.

Perhaps it may be to the immediate financial advantage of farmers to send young calves to market before they are fit for human food, or even to ship diseased chickens, hogs, and cattle; but no community can long tolerate such dishonesty and injurious conduct without inward debasement of character. And since local and personal agents cannot be trusted, every man who sincerely desires to promote morality should endeavor to secure complete state supervision and control of all food materials. In the long run no community can secure the best prices in the market if it once gains a reputation for indifference to the health of customers, if it becomes known for its dishonesty and recklessness of health and life. If its evil ways are due more to ignorance than to meanness, then a community should import experts competent to show what is right and wrong in the occupation which affects the physical welfare of the nation and its credit in foreign markets.

REFERENCES

I. P. Roberts, *The Farmstead*, chaps. vi, x, xii, xiv.
H. B. Bashore, M. D., *The Sanitation of a Country House.*
Also books on hygiene already mentioned.

## IV. DUTIES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN RELATION TO INDUSTRY AND WEALTH

1. DECISIVE FACTORS IN THE SITUATION.—To discover moral obligations men must not merely inspect their inner selves, but the real facts outside; must study not merely ancient wisdom but the stern teachings of present experience. What are some of the facts which determine the direction of activity in farming regions? Only a brief hint here is possible.

*a*) The population of the nation depends on agriculture and its product—farmers, urban dwellers, merchants, professional persons—all. The primary industry, basis of all other social life, is that of farming. If the rural population went on a general and sympathetic strike for one season, famine would stalk in the cities. Assuming that life is good, and to support existence a primal duty, we have the foundation of obligation in this situation.

*b*) Agriculture rests most obviouslv on nature's gifts, or, speaking with the religious accent, on the direct gift of God. The soil, climate, and seasons fix the limits of possible production in a nation. But as this is a matter which man cannot control we may more profitably turn to facts which rest on human conduct and for which men are responsible.

*c* ) We have seen above that health is a duty and here we come to the connection between production of good things and the vital energy which springs from health. A strong, well-fed, clean, sober people can and will do more to feed and clothe the nation, and make family, school, church, and government prosperous, than a feeble and sickly folk.

The social conditions of production are security of person and property, freedom to move and act, and opportunity to make the most of our powers. The intelligence of the rural population is a national asset, and especially that kind of intelligence which is concerned with the sciences and arts which quicken thought, train observation, and prepare the tiller of the soil to make it yield the largest possible product.

The life of the nation depends on the industry of those who occupy the tillable land. He who knows and yet stands idle will forget where he hid his talent in a napkin. Disposition to work steadily must be a social trait, common as hunger, or again famine snarls at the door. We might as well dwell on Sahara sands as on fertile prairies, if the people are loafers. Fortunately for idlers, most men are willing to toil. Industry is not merely a habit which benefits the worker; it has a social aspect and thus becomes moral.

2. VALUE OF NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE.—At this stage of our study we come in sight of the vast field of natural science and of the social sciences. No men are so dependent for their best success and usefulness on a wide range of knowledge as farmers, unless it is editors. To take only a few illustrations: successful discharge of duty on the farm depends on knowledge of the elements of soil on which plants are nourished, and this means chemistry. Stock raisers deal with various kinds of animals and must learn about selection of stock, nutrition, health and disease, heredity and habit; and this means biology, botany, physiology, hygiene. The making

of roads, ditches, bridges, dikes, buildings, involves laws of physics. Even to make a catalogue of the kinds of knowledge a farmer needs would require a pamphlet.

It follows as day follows night, that it is the duty of a rural community to educate itself, and as the soil wears out with bearing crops to make modern science perform for us the miracle of rendering worn-out soil more productive than virgin soil. The great Lincoln saw this need, and in the throes of war moved to establish agricultural colleges whose growth has been a blessing to mankind. Under the next head we shall attend to the agencies of education in rural communities.

REFERENCES

L. H. Bailey, *Cyclopedia of American Agriculture*, 4 vols. This work treats agricultural regions, organization of farms, environment of the life of animals and of men, crops, animals, and the social aspects and human interests of farmers.

F. W. Woll, *Handbook for Farmers and Dairymen*, gives numerous references to the rich literature of the agricultural professions.

H. C. Taylor, *Agricultural Economics*, gives the economic principles of agricultural industry and trading.

G. T. Fairchild, *Rural Wealth and Welfare.*

L. H. Bailey, *The Principles of Agriculture.*

The sociological literature is meager.

## IV. DUTIES OF A RURAL COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO SPIRITUAL CULTURE

We have spoken of agriculture and now we must give heed to the greater matter of human culture, which is after all the ultimate form of all culture. Man makes himself better by improving the earth if he uses science as means and morality as way.

1. EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY.—Here we may refer to those works on education which treat of the development of young children. We may note the fact that in the country family life has a relatively larger place in education than in the city where other influences play upon the child very early. In the country home parents have their children much to themselves without external distractions, and children soon begin to imitate and assist in the serious occupations of their elders. No city child has such a chance through infancy and early life to come into contact with nature in all her moods and aspects.

All crafts are plied in simple form, domestic animals are about the home, plants are the constant subject of conversation, birds sing in the trees, flowers blossom everywhere, and the muscles of the body are called into exercise without artificial apparatus. But to make the best use of these fine advantages the community must furnish to parents instruction in the principles of education, so that each father and each mother may become an efficient teacher.

2. THE RURAL SCHOOL.—The problem of the kind of school that a rural community needs has received of late the attention its importance deserves. One of the most attractive and inspiring books thus affirms the ideal of a practical organizer of better methods:

> If I were to formulate an educational creed for the country school, it would contain but two articles, namely: (1) the country child is entitled to every whit as good an educational opportunity as that enjoyed by the most favored city child attending the American public school; (2) to secure this right for the country child the country people must expend more money on the country school and expend it in a better way.

Only a few points can be suggested for study: The rural school should furnish careful and modern guidance in the care of health; it should, as all admit, teach thoroughly the arts of reading, writing, and keeping accounts, and so give the key to all treasures of knowledge; it should open the eyes of the children to the myriads of interesting and beautiful objects which surround them; it should lead them to become interested in the arts of agriculture; it should awaken their artistic interest and enable them to express that interest in drawing and sometimes in color; it should give them a taste for literature and enable them to live a life of solitude without weariness and with the ability to deepen life by study and thought; it should prepare them to defend their rights and perform their duties as citizens of a republic and give them a large and just notion of duties in relation to international affairs. The school should be a center of the best influences of culture not only for children but for all.

In order that the rural school may perform its high task it should be large enough to bring together enough children and youth to make school life enthusiastic and interesting to pupils and teachers, and to warrant the expenditure of sufficient money to secure good teachers. Small schools should be united in larger schools and the children

who are too far from the school to walk should be carried in vehicles provided as a necessary part of the school system.

It would hasten this movement for the improvement of the schools if the central school authorities of the commonwealth were required by law to give more thorough supervision and direction especially to schools in backward districts, and furnished with the necessary means.

REFERENCES

The book of Mr. O. J. Kern, "Among Country Schools," is itself a charming treatment of this subject, and on pages 302–8 it gives a long list of books and magazine articles which need not be repeated in this place, since Mr. Kern's book is indispensable for anyone who seriously wishes to study the matter.

3. THE RURAL CHURCH.—The duty of a rural community to its church is fixed by the nature of the work of the church. Religion is a universal need; communion with God is the heart of culture. The ideals of religion are the inspiration of science and the essence of morality. Life is not fully human without prayer and faith. Sin needs rebuke, righteousness must be enforced and interpreted in terms of daily tasks, and for all this every community needs the church.

But a church cannot perform its task unless it has ministers who are intelligent, sufficiently educated, spiritual, devoted to their work, and who give themselves earnestly and constantly to this one thing.

The chief enemy of religion in the country is the division of forces. Each denomination feels required to keep a minister of its own kind in each locality; and the result is that salaries are small; the minister is starved physically and the people are starved spiritually. We have touched upon the wisdom of consolidating country schools so that the teachers may be properly supported and suitable buildings and appliances be furnished; now we need to consolidate rural churches to avoid the deplorable and sinful waste which makes religious enterprises languish until the church itself brings religion into contempt. Improved country schools are making it impossible for the church to employ untrained and incompetent ministers; the young people simply will not listen to untaught preachers. Old people may go to sleep if the sermon is dull and meaningless, but young high-school pupils will slip away.

### VI. FEDERATION OF FORCES

All social interests are woven together; a community whose income is small cannot carry out common enterprises, provide good schools and churches, support teachers and ministers, and rise in civilization. The most vigorous and ambitious youth will take their chances in the large towns and cities and life will become stagnant. Hence it is desirable to bring together the members of the community who have some desire to improve conditions of industry, health, and culture. The ministers, lawyers, physicians, teachers and county superintendents, county officers, and farmers of light and leading may well form a federation of farmers' institutes, churches, schools, county fairs, literary clubs, and make studies of the entire field of health, industry, rural arts, domestic science, legal rights and duties, moral education, literary inspiration, reading, and spiritual life. Such federations are forming under various names in various parts of the country. An annual meeting may be held at which addresses are given by men and women who have studied the needs of rural conditions on the ground and have constructive suggestions for improvement to make. Grumblers dissipate energy. No person should be invited to speak more than five minutes who is not known to have a practical plan for betterment.

### TOPICS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

Suggestions for study of local conditions are furnished by the titles of each paragraph in this chapter; but others will grow out of these, out of reading the books recommended and out of conferences of the programme committee of the class.

### REFERENCES

In addition to books and articles mentioned in connection with preceding paragraphs we may refer to the two papers on the "Rural Community," by Weber and Butterfield, in the *Report of the Congress of Arts and Science*, Vol. VII.